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CAOINAN: *or some Account of the* ANTIENT IRISH
LAMENTATIONS. *By* WILLIAM BEAUFORD, *A. M.*

THE modes of lamentation, and the expressions of grief by
sounds, gestures and ceremonies, admit of an almost infinite
variety: so far as these are common to most people, they
have very little to attract attention; but where they consti-
tute a part of national character, they then become objects
of no incurious speculation.

Read Dec.
17, 1791.

THE Irish have been always remarkable for their funeral
lamentations, and this peculiarity has been noticed by almost
every traveller who visited them, and it seems derived from
their Celtic ancestors, the primæval inhabitants of this isle.
These were a timorous and unwarlike race, as their military
weapons, and every vestige of their customs and manners
strongly indicate: their religion was spiritual, and unstained with
human blood. Such a religion and such manners imply a

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susceptibility

susceptibility of tender impressions, and feminine expressions of sorrow. Grief quickly melted them into tears, and their oppressed hearts found relief in shrieks and groans; and hence it has been * affirmed of the Irish, that to cry was more natural to them than to any other nation, and at length the Irish cry became proverbial.

THE Belgic colonies, who succeeded the Celtes, were a very different race: of Scythic descent, they indulged in all the excesses of savage nature. Warfare was their pastime, and blood was the cement of their solemn covenants. The day of interment, among them, was occupied with feasting and singing: it was then they chaunted their rude songs, the joys of Valhalla, and the happy lot of the brave.

THE foregoing distinctions are founded in fact, and antiquity gives decisive evidence of their authenticity. Cæsar in † many places pointedly marks the levity and fickleness of the Gallic Celtes: that they had a ‡ softness which disqualified them from resisting calamities, and Tacitus § informs us, the Treveri and Nervii affected to be thought of Germanic origin, hoping thereby to avoid the disreputation attached to the Celtic character.

IT

* Williamson. orat. in suscep. diad. Car. 2.

† Comment. lib. 2, 3, 4.

‡ Molles ac minime resistens ad calamitates perferendas, mens Gallorum est. Cæs. lib. 3.

§ De mor. Germ.

It was not before some degree of civility was introduced among us, that our rude poetry, music and lamentations, assumed a regular form. Cambrensis, in the 12th century, says, the Irish then musically expressed their griefs, that is, they applied the musical art, in which they * excelled all others, to the orderly celebration of funeral obsequies, by dividing the mourners into two bodies, each alternately singing their part, and the whole, at times, joining in full chorus. This antiphonal † singing was coeval with Christianity in this isle. It was then the funeral elegy rose in poetic numbers, and was sung in poetic accents to the sound of musical instruments.

THE body of the deceased, dressed in grave-clothes, and ornamented with flowers, was placed on a bier or some elevated spot. The relations and Keeners ranged themselves in two divisions, one at the head and the other at the feet of the corps. The bards and croteries had before prepared the funeral Caoinan. The chief bard of the head chorus began, by singing the first stanza in a low doleful tone, which was softly accompanied by the harp: at the conclusion, the foot semi-chorus began the lamentation or Ullaloo, from the final note of the preceding stanza, in which they were answered by the head semi-chorus; then both united in one general chorus. The chorus of the first stanza being ended, the chief bard of the foot semi-

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chorus

* Walker's Irish Bards. Append. p. 20.

† Walker, *supra*.

chorus sung the second stanza, the strain of which was taken from the concluding note of the preceding chorus; which ended, the head semi-chorus began the second *Gol* or lamentation, in which they were answered by that of the foot, and then, as before, both united in the general full chorus. Thus alternately were the song and choruses performed during the night. The genealogy, rank, possessions, the virtues and vices of the dead were rehearsed, and a number of interrogations were addressed to the deceased: As, Why did he die? If married, whether his wife was faithful to him, his sons dutiful, or good hunters or warriors? If a woman, whether her daughters were fair or chaste? If a young man, whether he had been crossed in love? or if the blue-eyed maids of Erin treated him with scorn?

WE are * told that each versicle of the *Caoinan* consisted only of four feet, and each foot was commonly of two syllables: that the three first required no correspondence, but the fourth was to correspond with the terminations of the other versicles. This kind of artificial metre was much cultivated by the Irish bards, but, on the decline of that order, the *Caoinan* fell into the hands of women, and became an extemporaneous performance. Each province was supposed to have different *Caoinans*, and hence the Munster cry, the Ulster cry, &c. but they are only imitations of the different choruses of the same *Caoinan* independent of provincial distinctions. As the *Caoinan* was sung extempore, there being no general established tune, each set
of

* Lhuyd. *Archæolog. Brit.* p. 309,

of Keeners varied the melody according to their taste and musical abilities, carefully, however, preserving the subject or burden of the song throughout, both in the vocal and instrumental part, as begun by the leading Keener.

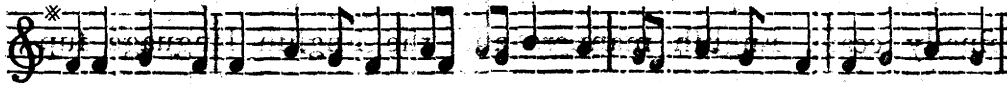
At present the Caoinan is much neglected, being only practised in remote parts, so that this antient custom will soon finally cease, English manners and the English language supplanting those of the aboriginal natives. The following example bears evident marks of bardic origin, both in its versification and language: it is probably a production of the 15th century. The music of the Gol or choruses is the same or nearly so with that played by the modern pipers, and by them denominated the Irish cries. This example, being an imitation of extreme and violent grief with broken lamentations, is wild and irregular, and can have but little merit as a musical composition; but may be of some account, as preserving the last remains of a very antient and universal custom.

CAOINAN,

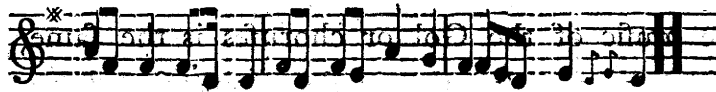
C A O I N A N,

OR IRISH FUNERAL SONG.

LARGO,



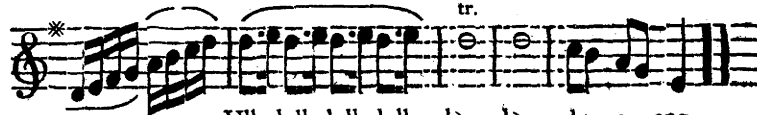
CE muc Connal coidhuim baifaogh, Ruireach, rathmar, rachtmhar eachthach Crodha creachach.
 O fon of Connal, why didst thou die? royal, noble, learned youth, valiant, active,



cathach ceadthagh Coidhuim baifaogh Ucha oinnagh.
 warlike, eloquent! Why didst thou die? Alas! awail-a-day!

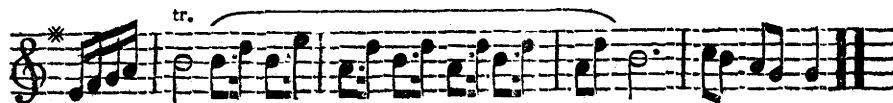
First Semi-Chorus.

TERMANTE.



Ulla-lulla-lulla-lulla lù lù ucht o ong.

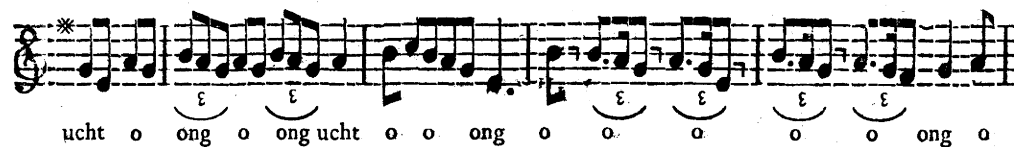
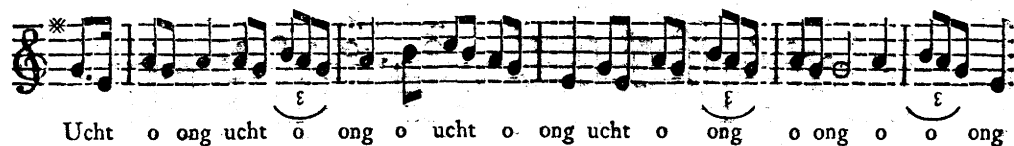
Second Semi-Chorus.



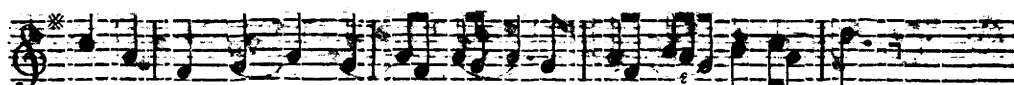
O ong ulla lulla lulla lulla lulla lulla lu ucht o ong.

Full

Full Chorus of Sighs and Groans.



Uchta oin-nagh! boothach bear-tach Sli-ochd an Heber cath-ach coinnagh. A muc.
Alas! alas! he who sprang from nobles of the race of Heber, warlike chief. O men



Con-nal each-agh earl--tach, Coidhinm baifaogh uchta o oin--nagh.
of Copnal, noble youth, why didn't thou die, alas! alas!

First Semi-Chorus.



Ul-la lulla lulla lulla lu lu o ong.

Second

Second Semi-Chorus.



O ong ulla lulla lulla lulla lù lù ucht o ong.

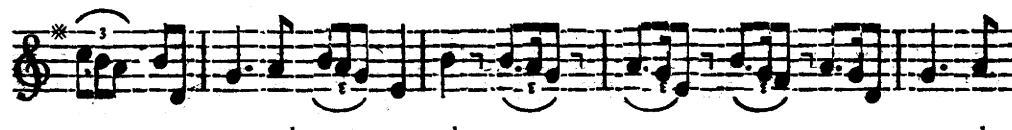
Full Chorus.



Ucht o ong o ong o o o ong ucht o ong o ong o ong



ucht o ong ucht o ong o ong ucht o ong o ong ucht o

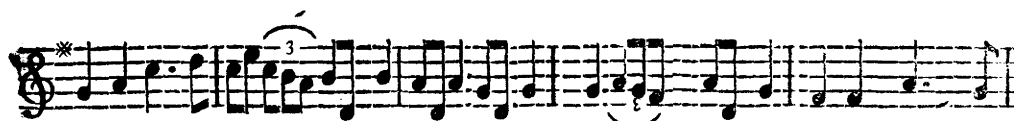


ong o ong ucht o ong ucht o o o o ong ucht



o ong ucht o ong o ong ucht o ong.

Ucht



Ucht o oin nagh mointeagh aigneach, Beith ach magh'rach abhneach caorteach Toiccagh moirgh'nteach

Alas! alas! he who was in possession of flowery meads, verdant hills, lowing herds, fruitful fields, flowing rivers and grazing flocks, rich, gallant,



glean ruirc cir-teach, Coid-huim bai-faogh ucht a oin—nagh.

Lord of the golden vale, why did he die, alas! a wail a day!

First Semi-Chorus.



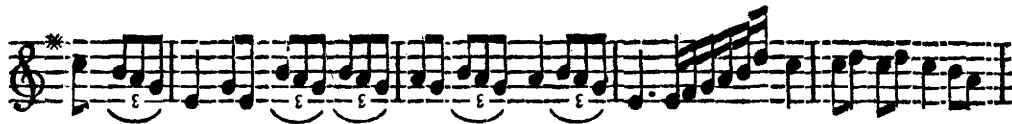
Ulla ulla lulla lulla lù lù o ong.

Second Semi-Chorus.

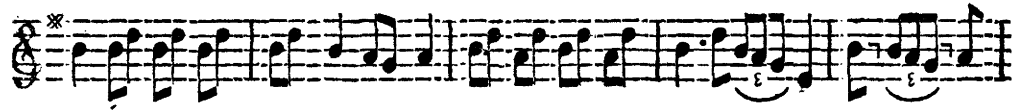


O o ong ulla lulla lulla lulla lù.

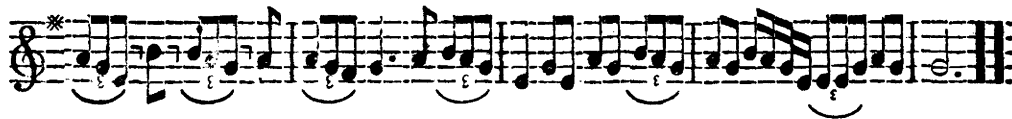
Full Chorus.



Ucht o ong ucht o ong ucht o ong o ong O ong o o ong o



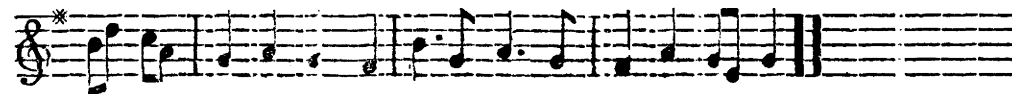
ong o o o o ong o ong o o o o ong uch o ong uch o ucht



O o o ucht o ong ucht o ong o o ong ucht o ong o ong.



Ucht a oin-nagh coid-huim bai—faogh Amuc Connal roimhcreadh cloidh each doighbrach
Alas! alas! why didst thou die, O fon of Connal, before the spoils of victory by thy



gliadhach do-nal neitheach Sgaith le feanna ucht a oinnagh.
warlike arm was brought to the hall of the nobles, and thy shield with the ancient. Alas! alas!

First

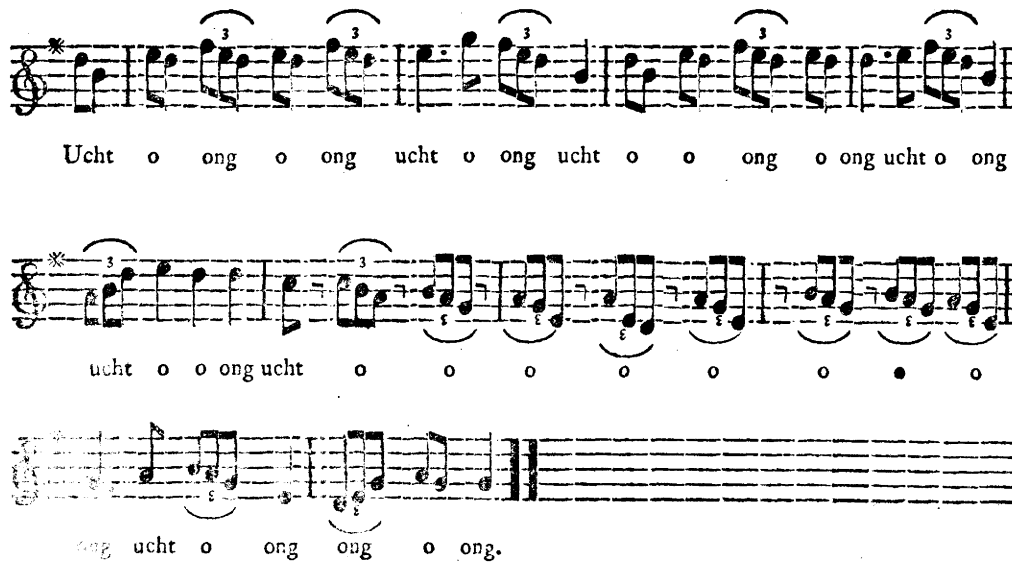
First Semi-Chorus.



Second Semi-Chorus.



Full Chorus.



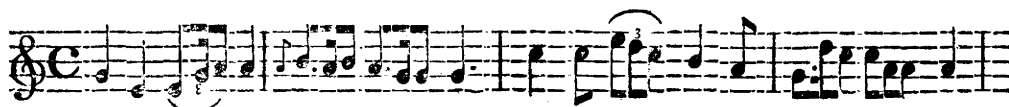
At the conclusion of the Keenan, the body was conveyed to the place of interment, attended by the friends and relations of the deceased, and accompanied by the cries of women, who at certain intervals sung the *Gol* or Ullaloo.

IN antient times, after the interment, the favourite bards of the family, seated on the grave or sepulchre, performed the *Connthal* or Elegy; which they repeated every new and full moon, for the first three months, and afterwards generally once every year, for persons of distinction. The Elegy was more regular than the Keenan, both in respect to its poetical composition and melodious cadence; though I have not been able to obtain any pieces of this kind, of a very antient date, nor the music appertaining to them. However, several families, both in Wales and this country, retained the custom to the close of the last century, and it is frequently alluded to in the Irish ballads and poetical romances.

THE following is said to be the lamentations of Fin M'Comhal over his grandson Oscar, who is supposed to have been slain in the battle of Gabhra in the third century. It is taken from the poem on the death of Oscar, and the music is still preserved in Connaught and the Highlands of Scotland. I have chosen this passage from that poetical romance, as it is probable the poetry and music are coeval, having both originated in the bardic school of Errus, in the county of Mayo, towards the close of the fifteenth century: a fountain from whence flowed the greater part
of

of those Irish ballads and romances which have, in these latter ages, become the foundation of the numerous ideal superstructures relative to the history and antiquities of this island.

M A R B H - R A N N O S C A R.



Mo laoch fein u, laoch mo laoch. Leanabh mo leanabh, ghil cha--ömh
O my own youth, youth of my youth. Child of my child, gentle, valiant,



Mo chroidhe lium—nich mar long, Gulath bhrath cha n'ei—rich Of—car.
My heart cries like a blackbird's. For ever gone, never to rise, O Oscar.

As the verification of this poem is evidently bardic, if we could be certain of the music being the original air we might form some idea of the state of that art among the Hibernian bards. One circumstance, however, seems in some measure to confirm its authenticity; the tune to which the song of the death of Oscar is sung, both in the west of Ireland and Highlands of Scotland, is nearly the same.

THE

THE several poetic and musical compositions of the Irish bards of the west and north were introduced into the Highlands by the Erse Bonaghts or Auxiliaries retained by the Irish princes during the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.